

Neurodiversity and Entrepreneurship

By: Claire Wang

Editor: Pravin Balasingam



The traditional workplace is often a stressful, frustrating environment for neurodivergent individuals. Recent employment studies have found that full-time employment levels for adults with ADHD are around 43% lower than neurotypical adults, and unemployment rates among adults with ASD may be as high as 80%. These statistics underscore that traditional work environments suppress neurodivergent qualities and compel individuals to meet neurotypical standards. However, entrepreneurship offers neurodivergent individuals the ability to create an environment that supports their needs and unlocks their full potential.

A 2016 French study of small business owners found that when viewing ADHD symptoms through an entrepreneurial lens, “inattentiveness becomes a desire to imagine and discover unexplored terrains, hyperactivity becomes an aptitude for multitasking and innovation, and impulsivity becomes a trigger of risk-taking.” Similarly, individuals with ASD have good attention to detail, out-of-the-box thinking, determination, and persistence — important traits for entrepreneurship. When working in an appropriate environment, such as their own business, neurodivergent individuals can be regarded as assets rather than problems. They can implement business strategies that align with their cognitive styles and harness their skills to drive productivity and success while minimizing barriers.

In 2021, autistic business owner G Sabini-Roberts gave a TED Talk arguing that we need to start promoting entrepreneurship as a viable career choice for neurodivergent individuals. They asserted that entrepreneurship can be a vehicle for neurodivergent individuals to “create businesses, to generate income and to build lives that allow their unique brilliance to shine without having to spend years in forms of employment that squash them or, even worse, teach them that they are incapable of succeeding.” By running their own business, neurodivergent

individuals can choose when, where, and how they can work — a huge step forward from the neurotypical workplaces that typically undervalue their talents.



Many neurodivergent individuals have founded highly successful businesses. Barbara Corcoran, founder of the real estate business The Corcoran Group and investor on *Shark Tank*, struggled in school her whole life due to dyslexia but leveraged her experiences to overcome failures when starting her business. Corcoran claims that dyslexia made her “more creative, more social, and more competitive” and taught her to work on her own terms. David Neeleman, founder of five commercial airlines, including JetBlue, once said that if there were a pill he could take to make his ADHD go away, he would not take it. He credits his success to ADHD, noting, “I can distill complicated facts and come up with simple solutions... My ADD brain naturally searches for better ways of doing things.”

It’s time for neurodivergent individuals to recognize entrepreneurship as a possible pathway to empowerment and success and for neurotypical individuals to support neurodiversity in the workplace by acknowledging and accommodating the unique strengths and challenges faced by neurodivergent employees. As G Sabini-Roberts put it, “You do not have to fit into the boxes that the world has been trying to put you into, because those boxes were not made for you. You can make your own box.”

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